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Capitalism and Homosexuality

in Eighteenth-Century Japan

Gary P. Leupp

We are contributing to a volume on “eighteenth-century homosexuality” with the assumption that there *was* such a thing, and that it occurred, at least, in North America, Europe, the Ottoman Empire, Qing China and Tokugawa Japan. We omit other homosexualities that certainly existed contemporaneously, among, say, the Azande of the southern Sudan, or the Sambians of New Guinea, excluding them (perhaps unconsciously) as primitive, preclass, or at least unknown to the West or outside its orbit in the eighteenth century. Theirs were not patterns of homosexual behavior that adapted to global historical developments; indeed, they seem almost ahistorical. Our discussion of eighteenth-century homosexualities seems predicated upon the recognition that some general changes underway on the planet during that century affected sexuality among *all* the peoples we discuss.

In a word, *capitalism* came to connect these peoples, and the modest purpose of this essay is to argue the centrality of that mode of production to our understanding of homosexuality in eighteenth-century Japan. The effort to examine the historical connections between sexuality, capitalism, and class society in general is at least as old as Friedrich Engels’ *The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884), and in recent decades scholars such as Jeffrey Weeks and David F. Greenberg have discussed how the evolution of capitalism has affected homosexual

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behavior in the modern west.¹ The connection between nascent capitalism and the specific construction of same-sex relations in Japan has, however, received little attention.

In *Male Colors: The Construction of Homosexuality in Tokugawa Japan*, I discussed the “commodification of male-male sexuality” during the Tokugawa period (1603-1868).² Gregory Pflugfelder adopted the term in *Cartographies of Desire: Discourses on Male-Male Sexuality in Japan, 1600-1950*, but his otherwise impressive work provides insufficient historical context for the understanding of the “male-male” discourses he dissects.³ Pflugfelder is concerned less with the history of male homosexual behavior than with the history of its representation. In the Tokugawa era, he explains, male homosexual relationships were primarily depicted in *commercial* literary production, constituting “popular discourse.” The general marketing of texts dealing with male-male sexuality, alongside flourishing male prostitution, constituted the commodification of male-male sexuality.⁴

Pflugfelder says little, however, about the conditions surrounding this commodification: the extraordinary wave of urban growth between 1580 and 1620; the rapid generation of a large bourgeoisie alongside an urbanized samurai class; the growth of a national market, etc. His, and others’, postmodernist focus upon the examination of representations too often slights the material conditions that give rise to discourses. Here I intend to show why institutional history really *does* matter in our effort to understand both male-male and female-female sexuality in Tokugawa Japan.

1. Engels associated freedom of contract in marriage and the conception of “love marriage as a universal right” with the “rising bourgeoisie” and capitalist production from the sixteenth century. See Frederick Engels, *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*, ed. Eleanor Burke Leacock (New York, 1975), p. 144f. Among recent treatments of capitalism and the construction of sexuality see David F. Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality* (Chicago, 1988), p. 347f; Jeffrey Weeks, “Capitalism and the Organization of Sex” in *Homosexuality: Power and Politics*, ed. Gay Left Collective (London, 1980), pp. 11-20.

2. Gary P. Leupp, *Male Colors: The Construction of Homosexuality in Tokugawa Japan* (Berkeley, 1995), pp. 66-74. From the late 1630s through the mid-1850s, Japan under the Tokugawa shoguns was largely sealed off from the outside world, and few changes occurred in the political structure. It thus seems to me appropriate, in discussing eighteenth-century sexualities in Japan, to draw upon sources dating from the late seventeenth through early nineteenth centuries.

3. Gregory M. Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire: Male-Male Sexuality in Japanese Discourse, 1600-1950* (Berkeley, 1999); see my review in the *American Historical Review* 106 (2001): 959.

4. Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire*, pp. 72, 77.

Foundations of the Tokugawa Order

The historical study of capitalism focuses upon the evolution of class relationships, principally those centering on wage-labor. The widespread commodification of labor in western Europe from the sixteenth century marks the dawn of capitalism; meanwhile, the establishment of colonies and international circulation of New World gold and silver had major repercussions for the social organization of many nonwestern societies, helping to stimulate, for example, what Chinese scholars have labeled “the sprouts of capitalism” in Ming China.⁵ The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries also saw a massive increase in economic activity, including mining operations in Japan, and the beginning of substantial Japanese commercial settlements from the Philippines to Siam. The crucial event in Japan’s transition to capitalism, however, was a thoroughly internal one: the decision made by a series of feudal rulers, from 1582 through the 1620s, to implement a policy called *heinô-bunri* (warrior-peasant separation).⁶

At this time, from five to ten percent of Japan’s total population belonged to the hereditary warrior class, the samurai. Being a samurai was not a vocation but rather a status category and, although the samurai were disproportionately male, any child of a male samurai, male or female, inherited the status.⁷ The samurai had for centuries resided among the agrarian population, in rice-producing or fishing villages, sometimes taking part in agriculture themselves, but after 1582 they were gradually transformed into an urban class. The peasant population was disarmed, obliged to turn over swords and muskets to feudal authorities; the sword thereafter became the specific emblem of samurai identity. In most parts of Japan the samurai were forced to withdraw from the land and take up residence in castle-towns. In 1600, after a century of incessant fighting, the Battle of Sekigahara brought nationwide peace. The Tokugawa shogunate was formally established in 1603.

5. Yeh-chien Wang, “Notes on the Sprouts of Capitalism” in *Chinese Social and Economic History from the Song to 1900*, ed. Albert Feuerwerker (Ann Arbor, 1982), pp. 51-57.

6. While the English working class emerged as a result of enclosure and population increase and the French from demographics and heavy taxation, the early modern proletariat in Japan appeared largely due to the feudal order’s requirements for urban labor power. As Lenin put it, “infinitely diverse combinations of this or that type of capitalist evolution are possible.” V. I. Lenin, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* (Moscow, 1977), p. 33. On the significance of incipient capitalism in Tokugawa Japan see Germaine Hoston, *Marxism and the Crisis of Development in Prewar Japan* (Princeton, 1986), esp. pp. 95-126; Edwin O. Reischauer and John K. Fairbank, *East Asia: The Great Tradition* (Boston, 1960), pp. 641-42; Ferdinand Braudel, *Capitalism and Material Life* (New York, 1967), 2:581.

7. Children of women who had married commoner men inherited their fathers’ status.

Following the suppression of dissident samurai in Osaka in 1615-16 and a major peasant rebellion in 1639, the country remained at peace for over two centuries. The Tokugawa polity consisted of a confederation of over 250 quasi-independent baronies obliged to follow basic laws set down by the military regime, which directly controlled a quarter of the arable land in the country. Embracing neo-Confucian ideology, it articulated a vision of society with the samurai as its natural rulers; the samurai, peasants, artisans, and merchants constituted four classes of descending rank, each subject to separate law codes and administration. Within the vast samurai class, the shogun—*daimyô* (barons)—and top feudal administrators enjoyed wealth and power; but lacking other sources of income most samurai became increasingly hard-pressed to live on their stipends paid out in rice (or rice and cash). In theory, they were allowed to cut down any commoner guilty of “insolence,” and one finds much evidence, especially in the early Tokugawa period, that samurai often used this prerogative, targeting wealthy merchants in particular for attack. But gradually the samurai were for the most part transformed from a military caste into a hereditary stratum of literate, peaceable bureaucrats.⁸

These were decades of rapid, dramatic change, as the newly pacified nation acquired a national administrative framework, a network of safe highways, and bureaucratic administrative structures. The demographic implications of *heinô-bunri* cannot be understated. Before 1580, out of a total population of about 15 million, there was only one metropolis: the imperial capital of Kyoto with perhaps 400,000 residents. A century later, both Osaka and Kyoto numbered between 400,000 and 500,000 residents, and Edo’s population approached a million. Half a dozen other towns had populations of over 60,000. Castle-towns (one per domain—over 250 in all) everywhere became hubs of commercial activity.⁹ In these towns, about half the residents were nonsamurai, urban commoners (*machikata*) ranging from day-laborers and peddlers to skilled craftsmen and wealthy merchants.

8. On this transformation see Eiko Ikegami, *The Taming of the Samurai: Honorific Individualism in the Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge, MA, 1995). On samurai gang violence see Gary P. Leupp, “The Five Men of Naniwa: Gang Violence and Popular Culture in Genroku Osaka” in *Osaka: The Merchants’ Capital in Early Modern Japan*, ed. James L. McClain and Wakita Osamu (Ithaca and London, 1999), pp. 127-31.

9. The great majority of modern Japanese cities were founded as castle-towns between the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

The Urban Population

In Japan there had always been cities with merchants and artisans; but these decades of urban construction were unprecedented in world history.¹⁰ Feudal fiat, designed to contain peasant discontent and control the samurai, resulted in the generation of Japan's early modern *chônin*, or bourgeoisie, and new class relations its architects could not have envisioned.¹¹ I have discussed elsewhere the commodification of labor power in domestic service, construction, transportation, and other fields from the seventeenth century; lifetime, hereditary forms of service, and corvée labor, gave way to short-term contractual wage-labor.¹² In some places manufacturers hired workers to produce commodities for the general market. Capitalist relations of production were never *dominant* in Tokugawa Japan, but they were widespread by the eighteenth century.

It is important to note that these changes in class relations occurred in a disproportionately male environment. The samurai, generally confined to town life from the early seventeenth century, were overwhelmingly male to begin with, and the proportion of unmarried male samurai seems to have grown during the first half of the period, principally due to poverty and the inability to support a consort. The proportion of *hatamoto* (bannermen; direct retainers of the shogun) who never married rose from about five to ten percent between 1600 and 1740.¹³ The commoner population, aggregating initially in response to the feudal demand for urban construction, transportation, and catering services, constituted the other half of most castle-town populations. Throughout the seventeenth century this component was also preponderantly, and in some places overwhelmingly, male. The new order required the establishment of towns peopled—and in large measure, built by—male warriors, construction workers, and day laborers. During the early eighteenth century there were

10. John Whitney Hall, "The Castle Town and Japan's Modern Urbanization" in *Studies in the Institutional Change of Early Modern Japan*, ed. Hall and Marius B. Jansen (Princeton, 1968), p. 176.

11. The term *chônin*, sometimes used in the English scholarship to refer to all urban commoners, applied mainly to house or shop owners and their households, which constituted typically 10-20% of the total urban population.

12. See Gary P. Leupp, *Servants, Shophands and Laborers in the Cities of Tokugawa Japan* (Princeton, 1992). For a discussion of capitalist wage-labor in manufacture in Tokugawa Japan see my dissertation "'One Drink from a Gourd': Servants, Shophands and Laborers in the Cities of Tokugawa Japan" (Ann Arbor, 1989), pp. 500-38.

13. This was the case with the *hatamoto* or direct retainers of the shogun. See Kozo Yamamura, *A Study of Samurai Income and Entrepreneurship* (Cambridge, MA, 1974), pp. 106-7.

170 or 180 males per 100 females in the shogun's capital of Edo.¹⁴ The ratio in other large cities in the eighteenth century was less disproportionate but still significant.¹⁵

The commoner population of Tokugawa cities feared and respected the samurai who, official edicts informed them, were their natural betters. The upper stratum of male samurai ruled society; lower samurai strata, however pathetic their pecuniary lot, were to be feared because they were armed. The Japanese bourgeoisie never generated a movement questioning the four-class system. Instead, *chônin* thinkers found ways to validate the role of the merchant or artisan *within* the existing order.¹⁶

The Floating World and Kabuki

Before turning specifically to the origins of a bourgeois homosexual tradition in Japan, we must note the extraordinary role of commercial sex in Tokugawa urban culture. Prostitution may be the world's oldest profession, but organized, licensed prostitution only began in Japan with the decision of the warlord Hideyoshi to establish a brothel quarter in Kyoto in the 1580s. By 1608, according to the account of a Spanish *hidalgo* visiting the city, there were 50,000 licensed prostitutes in the imperial capital.¹⁷ During the early Tokugawa period authorities in most cities established such districts, fixing the numbers and fees of prostitutes, and tightly policing egress and ingress into the gated quarters of what came to be called "the floating world" (*ukiyo*).¹⁸ The first shogun himself believed that while prostitution, male and female, was a "bad custom," its suppression would create graver problems; careful regulation was the answer.¹⁹

14. Saitô Osamu, *Shôka no sekai, uramise no sekai: Edo to Ôsaka no hikaku toshi-shi* (Tokyo, 1987), p. 53. Seventeenth-century figures (which do not survive) would probably have been even higher.

15. Gary P. Leupp, "Male Homosexuality in Edo during the Late Tokugawa Period, 1750-1850: Decline of a Tradition?" in *Imaging/Reading Eros: Proceedings for the Conference, Sexuality and Edo Culture, 1750-1850*, ed. Sumie Jones (Bloomington, 1996), pp. 105-9.

16. Najita Tetsuo, *Visions of Virtue in Tokugawa Japan: The Kaitokudo Merchant Academy of Osaka* (Chicago, 1987), esp p. 72f.

17. See Michael Cooper, comp., *They Came to Japan: An Anthology of European Reports on Japan, 1543-1640* (Berkeley, 1965), p. 280.

18. This was originally a Buddhist term referring to the transitory world of human consciousness. Like other such terms, it was, with some deliberate irreverent humor, applied to the vulgar world of the brothel quarter in the Tokugawa period.

19. A translation of the "Legacy of Ieyasu" can be found in A. L. Sadler, *The Maker of Modern Japan: The Life of Tokugawa Ieyasu* (London, 1937; New York, 1977), p. 392. See also Cecilia Segawa Seigle, *Yoshiwara: The Glittering World of the Japanese Courtesan*

Pleasure quarters—most famously, Yoshiwara in Edo—became cultural centers, offering men (and some women patrons) the finest cuisine and entertainment as well as commercial sex. Sexual pleasure was increasingly associated with the brothel district rather than the marriage bed. In medieval towns, according to the historian Wakita Haruko, commoner women had been vital to household management and production, and sexual love between husband and wife had served the household goals. But in the early modern period:

the wife came to be bound by maternal and housekeeping responsibilities based on consumption rather than production. Just as the wife sustained the household, women of the brothel quarters, segregated in distinct districts, became the objects of sexual love. The dichotomy of chaste wives and brothel sweethearts, so evident in Chikamatsu's plays, was to become a striking feature of the early modern period.²⁰

This is not to say there were no marriages (or noncommercial homosexual relationships) based on genuine love and affection. But popular literature suggests that for the average commoner, both heterosexual and homosexual sexual opportunities were best sought after in the "floating world."²¹

The patrons of pleasure quarters included both samurai and commoners, but in the quarter, where money talked and the merchant could procure the same delights as the samurai, bourgeois tastes definitely prevailed. The music of the banjo-like shamisen, newly imported from the Ryukyus in the seventeenth century and essential to both puppet and kabuki performances, rang out through the latticed fronts of the brothels. Widely depicted by neo-Confucian samurai thinkers as "vulgar" and inclined "to put lewd thoughts" into people's minds, its use passed from the demimonde of brothels and theaters into bourgeois homes.²² The quintessential Japanese artistic production of the period, the woodblock print, also had numerous connections to "the floating world" (*ukiyo*) of the

(Honolulu, 1993), p. 23.

20. Wakita Haruko, "The Medieval Household and Gender Roles within the Imperial Family, Nobility, Merchants and Commoners," trans. Gary P. Leupp in *Women and Class in Japanese History*, ed. Hitomi Tonomura et al. (Ann Arbor, MI, 1999), p. 94.

21. For details on the organization of male prostitution see Leupp, *Male Colors*, p. 71f.

22. Tao Denmin, "Tominaga Nakamoto no ongaku kan," *Tôhōgaku* 77 (Tokyo), p. 95f; Leupp, *Servants, Shophands*, p. 63.

pleasure quarter.²³ Perhaps one-fifth of the total output of prints consisted of erotica—often, explicit scenes of patrons coupling with courtesans; and a very large additional portion consisted of portraits of famous courtesans or kabuki actors.²⁴ These were works designed for mass production and were purchased by members of all classes.

The origins of the kabuki theater, which played a central role in the commodification of male-male sexuality, have often been described.²⁵ Here I would merely like to stress its transformation during the seventeenth century from an art form involving brief skits and dances by male and female (often cross-dressing) entertainers, appealing primarily to a samurai audience, to a highly sophisticated, yet very commercial, dramatic form. By the Genroku era (1688-1704) multiact plays, widely advertised, were performed in packed theaters throughout the annual season before primarily *chônin* spectators. Females were banned from the stage in 1629, following quarrels among samurai over their sexual favors; thereafter, the female impersonator (*onnagata*), and the actor specializing in depicting boys or young men (*wakashu*), became the focus of sexual interest. Fan clubs devoted to such actors attended dramas *en masse* to support their favorites.²⁶

The kabuki and puppet plays of Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653-1724) are among the great literary achievements of the Tokugawa period. Many deal with the lives of merchants and artisans, and very often are set in the brothel district or involve (usually tragic) love affairs between courtesans and patrons. Some deal with *nanshoku*, or male-male sexual relationships.²⁷ One rarely finds, in the study of world history, an urban culture so centered on the world of commercial sex. The ruling elite for its part seems to have viewed the “floating world” as a social safety valve.²⁸

23. Leupp, *Male Colors*, pp. 78-80.

24. Richard Lane, “Shunga” in *Kodansha Encyclopedia of Japan* (Tokyo, 1983), 7:187.

25. For an overview see Donald Shively, “Bakufu versus Kabuki” in *Studies in the Institutional History of Early Modern Japan*, ed. John W. Hall and Marius B. Jansen (Princeton, 1968), pp. 231-62, and Shively, “The Social Environment of Tokugawa Kabuki” in *Studies in Kabuki*, ed. James R. Brandon et al. (Honolulu, 1978), pp. 1-61.

26. See Matsudaira Susumu, “Hiiki Renchû (Theatre Fan Clubs) in Osaka in the Early Nineteenth Century,” *Modern Asian Studies* 18 (1984): 699-704.

27. On the term *nanshoku*, written with the Sino-Japanese characters for “male” and “color,” see Leupp, *Male Colors*, p. 7. It is virtually synonymous with *wakashudô*. For a listing of homoerotic kabuki plays see *Male Colors*, pp. 92, 98.

28. “The affluent commoner could find refuge from the humiliation of his position in the samurai world by commanding luxurious surroundings [in the brothel district] and the greatest esteem that flattery and enthusiastic attentions could convey.” Donald H. Shively,

Wealthy commoners, especially merchants, lived more comfortably than the great majority of samurai; but in the neo-Confucian conception of society they constituted the lowest of the four classes. Denied any significant administrative role, they were, in effect, encouraged to work diligently and amass fortunes—and then to squander those fortunes in activities which, while criticized by moralists, posed little threat to the regime.²⁹ While in Europe the early modern bourgeoisie spawned movements, influenced by Protestantism and the popular diffusion of vernacular Bibles, which denounced all nonprocreative sexualities as sinful, wasteful, and distracting, the Japanese bourgeoisie never developed a puritanical mentality. Physical pleasure was rarely problematized; it, in itself, was good. There are many literary depictions of shop hands (*tedai*) and clerks (*bantô*), for example, heading off for an occasional foray into the brothel quarter with their masters' blessing. The popular writer Takizawa Bakin, visiting Osaka in the 1790s, observed that shop hands in the city, after diligently working until around 7:00 p.m., would repair to the brothel quarter; and, so long as they did not embezzle his funds for the purpose, the master would not object.³⁰ The philosopher and popular writer Terakado Seikon (1796-1868) painted a similar picture of early nineteenth-century Edo.³¹ A healthy balance of work and sexual pleasure, including the patronage of prostitutes, was the ideal.³²

The Bourgeois Male Homosexual Tradition of the Tokugawa Period

We know very little about sexual relationships between males in peasant villages in pre-Tokugawa Japan—the society that generated the *machikata*. We know a great deal, however, about samurai homosexuality from the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries and can confidently assume that, as the early modern castle-towns coalesced, urban commoners must have noted much evidence of homosexual behavior among the warrior class. It was the norm, not the exception, for a *daimyô* to retain pageboys (*komono*, *kobito*) for their looks, and to choose one or

"Popular Culture" in *The Cambridge History of Japan*, vol. 4, *Early Modern Japan*, ed. John Whitney Hall (Cambridge, 1991), p. 747.

29. There were occasional crackdowns on unlicensed prostitution during reform movements; see Seigle, pp. 209-10.

30. Takizawa Bakin, *Nikki kôki shû* (Tokyo, 1929), 36:645-46; Leupp, *Male Colors*, p. 117.

31. On lower-class commoner male patronage of brothels in Edo see Andrew Markus, "Prostitutes and Prosperity in the Works of Terakado Seiken" in *Imaging/Reading Eros*, ed. Jones, p. 39.

32. Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire*, p. 235.

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more among them to serve as “night-mate.”³³ The pages retained as *wakashu* by samurai of rank were bound to their “elder brothers” by oaths, and sometimes by domain law, which might treat the relationship as a marriage and prohibit the youth from sexual relations with any others, male or female.³⁴ At all levels of samurai society, age-graded, role-structured male-male sexual relationships were common, acknowledged, and articulated.³⁵

From its inception the bourgeoisie associated this specific pattern of homosexual behavior (*wakashudô*, “the way of youths,” or *shudô*) with the samurai. Since the samurai were upheld by the shogunate as moral exemplars for the general population, their age-graded, role-structured homosexual relationships consequently served as a model for commoner males.³⁶ As noted above, Japan’s urban commoner class, unlike the early modern European bourgeoisie, emerged very rapidly as a result of *heinô-bunri*. While this policy quickly produced a distinctive *chônin* culture, the townspeople dutifully imbibed samurai values, often articulated in neo-Confucian terminology. Whereas early modern western bourgeoisies, in their political attacks upon the aristocracy, might inveigh against alleged moral failings of the elite (including the “unmentionable vice” of sodomy), the articulate commoner elite of Tokugawa Japan avoided such criticism of samurai, and the existing order, in general.

There was, in fact, in Japanese Buddhist discourse, ample precedent for the vilification of homosexual behavior. But by the Tokugawa period Buddhist priests were commonly associated with *shudô*, and *chônin* commentators rarely criticized it.³⁷ Rather, commoner men who made

33. Leupp, *Servants, Shophands*, pp. 98-99; Leupp, *Male Colors*, pp. 52-55.

34. In a story by Ihara Saikaku (1642-93), based upon an incident in the 1620s, a pageboy in the sexual service of a daimyo is executed as punishment for sleeping with another youth. See Munemasa Isoô et al., eds., *Ihara Saikaku shu* (Tokyo, 1973), 2:413-21; Paul Gordan Schalow, trans., *The Great Mirror of Male Love* (Stanford, 1990), pp. 97-104.

35. In such unions the younger partner served as the insertee partner in anal intercourse. We find references to intercrural intercourse as well, but only very rarely encounter allusions to fellatio.

36. The numerous homosexual relationships of the seventeenth-century shoguns Iemitsu ®. 1623-51) and Tsunayoshi ®. 1680-1709) were common knowledge; there seems to have been no effort to conceal them. See C. R. Boxer, trans., *A True Description of the Mighty Kingdoms of Japan and Siam by Caron & Schouten* (New York, 1971), p. 23; and Donald Shively, “Tokugawa Tsunayoshi, the Genroku Shogun” in *Personality in Japanese History*, ed. Albert Craig and Donald Shively (Berkeley, 1970), pp. 98-99.

37. The tenth century priest Genshin, in his widely circulated *Ôjôyôshû* (Collected Essays on Rebirth into Paradise), condemns monks who have sex with acolytes to rebirth in a specified level of hell. See Hanayama Shôyû, ed., *Ôjôyôshû* (Tokyo, 1972), p. 52. On male-

reference to male-male sexuality depicted it as a refined “way” (*dô*) prevalent among the elite, which might lead some men astray (there were many violent incidents stemming from homosexual passion), but was morally unobjectionable.³⁸ One seldom finds in either popular literature or legal texts the condemnation of any particular sexual act.³⁹

Thus in the bustling young cities of Tokugawa Japan, a samurai class with a long tradition of male-male sexual behavior coexisted with a commoner stratum that produced its own homosexual tradition. Like the samurai one, the earlier *nanshoku* tradition made the *wakashu* the object of desire and required age-graded, role-structured relationships. But the *chônin*'s *shudô* differed from the elite tradition in that the *wakashu* was typically paid cash for his services. The “way of youths” centered unabashedly on male prostitution.

Bourgeois literature amply illustrates this point. “Professionals,” opines a Buddhist monk at a Kyoto male brothel, in Ihara Saikaku's *Nanshoku ôkagami* (Great Mirror of Masculine Sex, 1687),

make particularly good *wakashu*. There are some boys who exchange vows [with older men] from the heart . . . but these [prostitutes] don't experience that [sort of emotional] pleasure. Yet these working boys, who give up their bodies for customers' use from the very first meeting, do better [in bed] than the other [type of] *wakashu*, who get deeply emotional about it.⁴⁰

male sexual relations involving Buddhist clerics see Leupp, *Male Colors*, pp. 35-36; Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire*, pp. 73-76; Bernard Faure, *The Red Thread: Buddhist Approaches to Sexuality* (Princeton, 1998), pp. 210-40.

38. On Tokugawa-era violent incidents rooted in homosexual passion see Leupp, *Male Colors*, pp. 164-67; Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire*, pp. 124-33; Ikegami, *The Taming of the Samurai*, pp. 209-10; Ujiie Mikito, “From Young Lions to Rats in a Ditch: The Decline of *Shudô* in the Edo Period” in *Imaging/Reading Eros*, ed. Jones, p. 115.

39. Male-male oral sex, however, was treated in *shudô* texts as obsolete, disreputable, or merely humorous. See Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire*, p. 41 n. 50. One finds so little reference to it, even in comprehensive sex manuals, that I have suggested it was considered taboo, perhaps because in the act, passive and active roles were too ambiguous to conform to the neo-Confucian status considerations underlying male-male sexuality in the period. Leupp, *Male Colors*, pp. 191-94.

40. Munemasa Isoô et al., eds., *Ihara Saikaku shu*, 2:582. My translation. Compare Schalow, trans., *The Great Mirror of Male Love*, p. 294: “Professional boys are the finest. Others make vows of love from mutual feelings of affection . . . but these boys have no such pleasures. They must make themselves available to their patrons from the very first meeting before they have even had time to get acquainted. Such love far surpasses the affection of other youths.” Here and elsewhere Schalow insists on finding “love” in Saikaku's writings, where the writer is in fact alluding to impersonal sexual contacts.

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In the introduction to his work, the great Osaka popular writer asks twenty-three rhetorical questions, comparing *joshoku* (sex with women) and *nanshoku*. Among them:

Which is to be preferred . . . Lying rejected next to a courtesan, or conversing intimately with a kabuki boy who is suffering from hemorrhoids? . . . Buying a *kakoi* courtesan the day after suffering a gambling loss, or procuring a boy on the streets after a market collapse affecting goods in which you have invested? . . . Becoming intimate with a bathhouse girl, or secretly visiting a youth who is on a 30-day contract to another man?⁴¹

In fourteen of the questions, the youths compared with various females are those hired for sexual services. Commoners clearly associated male-male pleasure, like good sex in general, with *commercial* sex.

Pleasure quarters were typically located near wards specializing in the kabuki drama, where actors' homes, large elaborate theaters, and, sometimes, male brothels were located. Male prostitutes were available to men and women alike. Shogunal officials conflated kabuki actors, assumed to double as prostitutes, with courtesans; thus a section of the *Ofuregaki* (edicts issued in Edo, published in several compilations during the eighteenth century) is devoted to the regulation of both groups in the "floating world."⁴²

The *chônin* seeking the company of male prostitutes might, at least in Edo, visit one of the *nanshoku-jaya* ("male sex teahouses") that flourished into the mid-eighteenth century. The youths here were employed by brothel-owning entrepreneurs, typically on ten-year contracts. The brothel owner or his agents would recruit boys from impoverished families, paying large advances to their guardians, guarantors, and perhaps employment agents at the time the contract was signed. The prostitute was expected to serve out his full term; were he to abscond, the employer would seek compensation from the party listed above.⁴³ This sort of employment

41. See Schalow, trans., *The Great Mirror of Male Love*, p. 53f.

42. Ishii Ryôsuke and Takayanagi Shinzô, eds., *Ofuregaki Kanpô shûsei* (Tokyo, 1936), pp. 1238-52. The title of this section, *Kabuki shibai yûjo yarô bikuni tachi no bu*, translates as "Section on kabuki theater, female prostitutes, male prostitutes, and *bikuni*," the latter a type of itinerant female prostitute.

43. The same system prevailed in brothel-based female prostitution; see Seigle, pp. 81-82.

mirrored standard merchant household practice of hiring apprentices on ten-year contracts.⁴⁴

In Osaka, Kyoto and elsewhere, boys recruited as kabuki actors were also made available by the heads of their troupes to paying customers who would summon them to teahouses specializing in female prostitution. The most popular and attractive received the highest fees. From the late seventeenth century, theater critics published numerous *yakusha hyōbanki* (actor-critiques), which described both the dramatic talent and physical charms of popular performers. The *Yakusha ōkagami gassai* (The Complete Great Mirror of Actors, ca. 1692) indicates the affluent consumer's dual interest in the actor as artist and potential bed partner. The author, discussing the brilliant *onnagata* Yoshizawa Ayame (1673-1729), declared, "Any way you look at it, he has lovely eyes. If I had money, I would be tempted to woo him."⁴⁵

Outside the theater districts males might initiate sexual contact in public baths, which existed in every city, usually owned by entrepreneurs who charged entry fees.⁴⁶ Establishments called *hito-yado* or *naka-yado*, which rented out rooms for trysts, probably accommodated same-sex couples.⁴⁷ One might hire a sexual partner for a period of months, or, if for a brief tryst, on the street where attractive young men peddled a variety of goods as a cover for prostitution. The wealthy merchant might employ a good-looking shop boy, in part for sexual purposes; and we also find references to sexual relations between male staff members, such as clerks and apprentices, in merchant households.⁴⁸ Other texts portray city boys offering sexual favors to men for gifts, or even without expectation of remuneration.⁴⁹ Overall,

44. See Leupp, *Servants, Shophands*, pp. 18-25 for details.

45. Yoshizawa's career trajectory was not unusual. After the death of his peasant father he had been obliged to work as an *iroko* (lit. "sex child") in Osaka's Dōtonbori theater district, but by his mid-teens had become a popular actor. See Mette Ladèrrière, "Yoshizawa Ayame (1673-1729) and the Art of Female Impersonation in Genroku Japan" in *Europe Interprets Japan*, ed. Gordon Daniels (Tenterden, Kent, 1984), p. 234.

46. For some details see Leupp, *Servants, Shophands*, p. 115.

47. Saikaku mentions maidservants meeting male friends for brief rendezvous at such establishments. See for example, Saikaku Ihara, *Some Final Words of Advice*, trans. Peter Nosco (Rutland, VT and Tokyo, 1980), p. 225.

48. Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire*, p. 79; Schalow, trans., *The Great Mirror of Male Love*, p. 53.

49. Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire*, pp. 55-56, suggests that in popular discourse the *wakashu* is generally depicted as deriving no pleasure from his role. However, a variety of texts (including some Pflugfelder cites) refer to the insertee's physical enjoyment. The willingness of some to dispense with remuneration plainly indicates that some males desired anal penetration, and the literature matter-of-factly notes this. See Leupp, *Male Colors*, pp.

however, one is struck by the commercialization of sexuality, including male-male sexuality, prevalent in the era.⁵⁰

The contrast with the samurai *shudô* tradition was clear.⁵¹ Thus, in a literary work of the 1830s a samurai from Satsuma, forced to separate from a cross-dressing boy prostitute (*kagama*) at the end of his assignment in Edo, weeps that their “brief love must now be forsworn; no longer can we two be as brother and brother.” He tells the boy he must return to his wife but “will never trade her love for yours,” and will look forward to his return to Edo, when he will bring the boy gifts. The latter’s response is coolly mercenary. He has no use for the brotherhood bonds (*kyôdai musubi*) linking *nenja* and *wakashu*. Rather, he thinks to himself, “What use have I for you next year? What do you *think* I want, apart from good yellow gold?”⁵²

Both the samurai tradition of *shudô* and its newer plebeian variety were celebrated in hundreds of works devoted to the theme published in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, available for purchase or rent at bookstores in the big cities, and circulated throughout the country. Such popular works as *Nanshoku ôkagami* (reprinted well into the eighteenth century), purchased by commoners as well as samurai, highlighted the difference between the “elegant” tradition and the crasser type of *shudô* found in the brothel district. This collection of stories was divided into two parts: the first half dealt with samurai homosexual relationships and the second with men’s desire for kabuki actors and male prostitutes (and the financial ruin this often entailed). The two traditions of male-male sexuality, samurai and bourgeois, were thus juxtaposed. This was the case in much of the commercial homoerotic literature circulating in the eighteenth century.

178-82.

50. The market in male prostitutes could be volatile. Saikaku, for example, notes that when a large conference of Zen priests took place in Kyoto in 1652, fees shot up and kabuki actors began servicing clients in two shifts, daytime and nighttime. See Munemasa et al., eds., *Ihara Saikaku shu*, pp. 467-68; Schalow, trans., *The Great Mirror of Male Love*, p. 190.

51. One should note, however, that the traditional samurai conception of *shudô* continued to be articulated, for example, by the Kyushu samurai Yamamoto Tsunetomo, whose *Hagakure* (Hidden by Leaves, transcribed by a disciple in 1716), stresses monogamous homosexual relationships devoid of any mercenary content. See William Scott Wilson, trans., *The Book of the Samurai: Hagakure* (Tokyo, 1979), esp. pp. 58-59; and the discussion in Saeki Junko, *Bishônen tsukushi* (Tokyo, 1992), pp. 181-208. But interestingly, Yamamoto indicates familiarity with Saikaku’s *Nanshoku ôkagami*, published in faraway Osaka, which celebrates both samurai *shudô* and the prostitution-based bourgeois tradition. Wilson, *The Book of the Samurai*, p. 58.

52. Markus, “Prostitutes and Prosperity,” p. 41.

If there were numerous ways to make money through facilitating homosexual contacts, the public demand for homoerotic literary material, which proliferated remarkably during the period, generated further profits. The folklorist Iwata Jun'ichi (1900–45) counted 566 works dealing significantly with homoerotic themes during the Tokugawa period. Half of these (269) were published in the eighteenth century.⁵³ Commercially published materials such as erotic prints and *senryū* (humorous poems) frequently depicted homosexual behavior, and we also find useful information in illustrated advertisements for sexual products. Some of the most popular artists and writers of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries produced advertising fliers (*hikifuda*) for all manner of patrons selling medicines, cosmetics, foodstuffs, etc., as well as lubricants for use in anal sex, hemorrhoid medicine (an assumed necessity for the *wakashu*), and sex toys (such as artificial anuses), sold by shops in Edo, Kyoto and Osaka.⁵⁴ From all this material townspeople acquired information about the “way” of male-male sex.

That “way” seems to have *declined* from the mid-eighteenth century. Male prostitution was the key institution in the emergence of a *chōnin* version of *shudō*. But male brothels, in Edo at least, declined drastically in number over the eighteenth century, suggesting a reduced demand for their services; the number of male prostitutes dropped by 90% between the 1750s and 1833.⁵⁵ Meanwhile, fewer literary works relating to the topic appeared, and we also find far fewer references to powerful samurai involved in homosexual relationships.⁵⁶ This decline, which cannot be attributed to political or legal changes, is widely acknowledged.⁵⁷ Urban men by the late eighteenth century seem, in fact, to have been less inclined than those of the early 1700s to spend money on male prostitutes or homoerotic literature.

I have proposed that this change reflects demographic shifts—specifically, the gradual equalization of urban sex-ratios related to the feminization of domestic service, and the greater opportunities for

53. Iwata Jun'ichi, *Nanshoku bunken shoshi* (Ise, 1973), pp. 91-142.

54. For details, Leupp, *Male Colors*, pp. 112-13. On sexual advertising in general see David Pollack, “Marketing Desire: Advertising and Sexuality in Edo Literature, Drama and Art” in *Imaging/Reading Eros*, ed. Jones, pp. 47-62.

55. Nishiyama Matsunosuke et al., eds., *Edo gaku jiten* (Tokyo, 1984), p. 557.

56. Iwata lists 160 works published from 1700 to 1749, and 108 from 1750 to 1799, a decline of one-third. For the period 1800-49, he lists exactly 100 titles.

57. Tsuneo Watanabe and Jun'ichi Iwata, *The Love of the Samurai: A Thousand Years of Japanese Homosexuality* (London, 1987), p. 121; Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire*, pp. 93-95; Ujiie, “From Young Lions to Rats in a Ditch,” pp. 116-17.

heterosexual marriage.⁵⁸ As Ujiie Mikito has shown, the marriage rate among samurai in Edo increased dramatically, while the age of marriage decreased from the late seventeenth century.⁵⁹ While some have dismissed my suggestion as simplistic or “deterministic,” none have yet attempted to offer alternative explanations for the decline.⁶⁰

Recent work by economic historian J. Mark Ramseyer might, however, help further explain the conspicuous drop in male prostitution. He argues that by the mid-eighteenth century changes in the nature of the labor market better enabled children placed in long-term employment contracts by their guardians to abscond, or by the implicit threat to abscond (leaving those guardians with the burden of compensating the employer), to gain greater personal control over their working lives.⁶¹ This would have particularly been the case with males, and since male prostitution was generally regarded as an odious profession, its practitioners’ ranks may have rapidly depleted as other job options proliferated.⁶²

Female-Female Sexuality in Tokugawa Japan

We know little about premodern and early modern female-female sexuality in Japan, although many scholars have asserted that lesbianism flourished in the imperial and shogunal harems.⁶³ During the Tokugawa period popular writers occasionally, and usually matter-of-factly, recognized the phenomenon without manifesting much interest in it. Their references constitute meager primary material in comparison with the literature on male-male relationships, but they indicate that female-female sexuality was, like male homosexuality, significantly commodified during

58. Leupp, “Male Homosexuality in Edo,” p. 108; see also Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire*, p. 93.

59. He states, however, “It is difficult to determine whether this phenomenon was a cause or the result of the decline of *nanshoku*.” Ujiie, “From Young Lions to Rats in a Ditch,” pp. 116-17.

60. See Paul Gordon Schalow’s review of *Male Colors* in the *Journal of Japanese Studies* 23 (1997): 196-201; and Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire*, p. 137 n. 104.

61. J. Mark Ramseyer, “The Market for Children: Evidence from Early Modern Japan,” *Journal of Law, Economics, & Organization* 7 (1995): 127-49.

62. For sensitive and quite similar depictions of the male prostitute’s lot in the 1680s and 1830s respectively see Schalow, trans., *The Great Mirror of Male Love*, p. 250, and Markus, “Prostitutes and Prosperity,” p. 40.

63. See Sasama Yoshihiko, *Kôshoku engo jiten* (Tokyo, 1989), p. 489; also Gary P. Leupp, “The Floating World is Wide: Some Suggested Approaches to Researching Female Homosexuality in Tokugawa Japan,” *Thamyris: Mythmaking from Past to Present* 5 (1998): 6-7.

the period. Literary sources indicate that some female prostitutes catered to women, including widows and wives unhappy with heterosexual marriage. In a story by the Kyoto writer of popular fiction Ejima Kiseki (1666-1735), published in 1717, one refined wife regularly accompanies her husband to Kyoto's Shimabara pleasure quarter, where each (apparently separately) purchases the services of female prostitutes.⁶⁴ In a Saikaku novel a young woman, hired as a maidservant, learns she has in fact been employed to share her mistress' bed and to alternately play the "male role" and the "female role." "I've had a lot of jobs," she dryly notes.⁶⁵

Woodblock print depictions of lesbian sex—probably produced primarily for a male audience—while not numerous, were executed by some of the finest *ukiyo-e* masters of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁶⁶ These tend to represent women engaging in sex employing the double-headed dildo (called, among a host of other names, *tagaigata* or "shape for mutual use"). Such situations were not, as has been implied, mere male fantasy.⁶⁷ The toys were in fact advertised—specifically for dual female use—and marketed.⁶⁸

Conclusion

We know about eighteenth century Japanese homosexuality because of texts—works of instruction, erotica, sex manuals, popular fiction, etc.—for the most part written for sale in bookstores to a variegated urban audience. Perhaps we can never get beyond texts to determine everything that "really happened" in the past. But the sources I have drawn upon convince me that the newly-emergent bourgeois class, created by *heino bunri* and castle-town construction, spontaneously generated a new homosexual tradition from the mid-seventeenth century, centering on

64. See the translation of "A Wayward Wife" in Howard Hibbett, *The Floating World in Japanese Fiction* (Rutland, VT and Tokyo, 1975), pp. 104-11. For other references to female-female prostitution see Leupp, "Floating World," pp. 9-15.

65. Ihara Saikaku, *The Life of an Amorous Woman*, trans. Ivan Morris (New York, 1963), pp. 183-88; also Leupp, "Floating World," for different translation.

66. See Leupp, "Floating World," pp. 18-23.

67. A prominent Japanese feminist scholar suggests that in Tokugawa erotica, "The predominant use of the dildo in lesbian sex imposes a male view on lesbianism as an occasional substitute for heterosexual intercourse," and that the use of the double-headed dildo depicted in such material "turns a lesbian partner into a male substitute"—at least, within the "male gaze." Ueno Chizuko, "Lusty Pregnant Women and Erotic Mothers: Representations of Female Sexuality in Erotic Art in Edo" in *Imaging/Reading Eros*, ed. Jones, p. 111.

68. See Leupp, "Floating World," pp. 26-27.

commercial male-male sex. Deeply influenced by samurai culture in matters pertaining to sexuality, yet engaging in commercial activities disdained by (indeed, forbidden to) the samurai, and accustomed to human relationships mediated by wages and fees, the *chônin* from their inception commodified sexuality in general. They had no reason to exclude homosexual activity from the range of pleasures they marketed and consumed.

The bourgeois tradition of male homosexuality presupposed an urban-based money economy and the commodification of labor-power. This variety of *shudô* based upon commercial sex—involving fluctuating fee scales, advertising, critical commentary, the marketing of accoutrements, etc., and integrally linked to the main money-making entertainment genre of the time—testifies (along with the emergence of wealthy merchant households, labor markets, grain futures exchanges, banking and credit institutions, etc.), to the early development of capitalism in Japan. But institutional and economic change, which helped produce *chônin*-style *shudô*, also contributed to its decline.

The bourgeois tradition of male-male sex reached its acme in the mid-eighteenth century, and slowly waned over the following century, as demand for male prostitutes and homoerotic literature and art diminished. (Age-graded, role-structured male homosexuality did, however, remain common in universities and military academies into the early twentieth century, when it was widely regarded by the westernizing elite, influenced by contemporary German sexological theory, as a national embarrassment).⁶⁹ The historical trajectory of female-female sexuality is more difficult to trace, although we encounter it where we might expect to: in popularly marketed literature, in advertisements for sexual products and in literature pertaining to the prostitution districts. In any event, further progress in the study of same-sex sexuality in eighteenth-century Japan will most likely stem from research strategies that combine institutional history with literary analysis, and give due attention to the central function the marketplace has played in the construction of sexual behavior in all early modern societies.

69. Donald T. Roden, *Schooldays in Imperial Japan: A Study of the Culture of a Student Elite* (Berkeley, 1980), p. 206; Leupp, *Male Colors*, pp. 202-4.